

Chao 照Cheng-shou 正受Chien 見Chin-chu 堅住Chuan-hsin 專心Pa(-chieh)-chen 法(界)身Pa-shih tsan 法事讚 (T. 1979)hsiang 想Hsien(-ch'ien) 現(前)I-tsu-hsin-hsin 衣自信心Ju . . . hsin-hsiang 入 . . . 心想K'un 看K'an-chi en 看見Kuan (-ch'ie) 觀(察)Kuan-fo (san-mei hai ching) 觀佛(三昧海經)Kuan-nien Pa-men 觀念法門 (T. 1959)Kuan-wu-liang-shou-fo ching (shu) 觀無量壽佛經 (疏)K'ung 空 (T. 365)Nien-fo 念佛San 散Shan-tao 善導Szu-wei 思惟Ti-kuan 諦觀Ting 定T'ing-chien 聽見Wu-men Ch'an-ching yao-yung-fa 五門禪經要用法

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SUFİ FOLK
LITERATURE AND
THE EXPANSION
OF INDIAN ISLAM

The secondary literature on medieval Indian society frequently portrays the Sufis as a group that provided a vital link between Hindus and Muslims, to some extent mitigating the harshness of the Muslim military conquest of the subcontinent.¹ Many writers have advanced the argument somewhat further by identifying the Sufis as important agents in the conversion to Islam of a large segment of India's Hindu population, especially Hindus of lower castes.² But what is lacking in this literature is a satisfactory explanation of how such conversions might have taken place, of how an essentially esoteric mystical tradition might have filtered down to commoners in some sort of comprehensible and appealing form. It would be hard to imagine, for example, how depressed and illiterate Hindu castes such as the cotton cleaners or the barbers could have been attracted to an

¹ See H. K. Sherwani, "Cultural Synthesis in Medieval India," *Journal of Indian History* 41, no. 1 (April 1963): 256-57; Tara Chand, *Society and State in the Mughal Period* (Delhi, 1965), pp. 96-100; Yusuf Husain Khan, "Sufism in India," *Islamic Culture* 30 (July 1956): 252; M. Yassin, *A Social History of Islamic India (1605-1748)* (Lucknow, 1958), p. 61.

² See T. W. Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam: A History of the Propagation of the Muslim Faith*, 2d ed. (London, 1913), pp. 270-71; Aziz Ahmad, *Studies in the Islamic Culture in the Indian Environment* (Oxford, 1964), pp. 83-84; A. B. M. Hashim, *The Foundation of Muslim Rule in India*, 2d ed. (Allahabad, 1967), pp. 305-6; M. Muzoch, *The Indian Muslims* (London, 1967), p. 22; J. A. Nizami, *Studies in Medieval Indian History and Culture* (Allahabad, 1968), p. 92; A. Ismail, *Society and Culture in Medieval India* (Calcutta, 1969), pp. 192-203; A. L. Srivastava, *Medieval Indian Culture* (Agra, 1964), p. 78; M. Y. Tizus, *Islam in India and Pakistan* (Calcutta, 1959), pp. 48-49.

abstract system of mystical stages and states requiring an immense degree of intellectual and spiritual discipline. Moreover, the Sufis of medieval India, as elsewhere, frequently stressed the elitist nature of their circles and the necessity of keeping their most esoteric knowledge to themselves. Indeed, one distinguished scholar has argued that Sufis in general felt a certain distrust of the common man and that this feeling was evidenced by their separation of the initiated Sufi from the noninitiated layman.³

One likely reason for the failure to explain the attraction of Hindu nonelites to Sufis has been the tendency among many scholars of Sufism to concentrate almost exclusively on the mystical literature, as opposed to the folk literature, as representing the sum and substance of the Sufi movement. The mystical literature, which can be said to represent the "high tradition" of the Sufi movement in India and elsewhere, consisted of treatises on the abstract stages and states originally formulated by such mystical thinkers as Ibn al-'Arabi. This literature was written for the edification of fellow Sufis and does not seem to have circulated among the lower elements of Hindu India, nor was it intended to. Moreover in India, as in most of the non-Arab Muslim world, such literature was usually written in Persian, which was certainly not a vernacular language among the nonelite Hindu population. Hence if it is true, as R. A. Nicholson has noted, that "Sufism is at once the religious philosophy and the popular religion of Islam,"⁴ the link between the two has not been clearly established, at least as far as concerns Indian Islam.

Based on research on the medieval Deccan city-state of Bijapur (1490-1686), it is my opinion that such a link was supplied in at least one sector of the Indian subcontinent by the folk literature of certain local Sufis. Consisting of a number of short poems written in one of the vernacular languages of medieval Bijapur, Dakani, this literature employed indigenous themes and imagery for the propagation not of complex mystical doctrines of the sort mentioned above, but of a simpler level of Sufi and also of Islamic precepts. Written mainly in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by Bijapur Sufis belonging to the Chishti order, or by their descendants scattered elsewhere in the Deccan, this literature has been preserved in the oral tradition of Dakani-speaking villagers throughout the Deccan plateau. It has been suggested

that until the twentieth century, when radio and cinema took its place, folk poetry of Sufi origin had occupied a dominant position in the folk culture of Deccan villages.⁵ What, then, was the nature of this literature, to whom did it appeal, and what was its relation to Islam or to Sufism?

The bulk of the folk poetry written by Sufis was sung by village women while engaged in various household chores. The most common types included the *chakki-nama*, so called because it was sung while grinding food grains at the grindstone or *chakki*, and the *charaka-nama*, sung while spinning thread at the spinning wheel, or *charaka*. Other types of such folk poetry included the *lari-nama* or lullaby, the *shadi-nama* or wedding song, the *shagan-nama* or married woman's song, and the *sabai* or eulogistic song.⁶ It is evident that most of these poetic forms appealed especially, and probably exclusively, to women. For in the villages of the Deccan it was the women who for centuries spun the cotton into thread, ground the *jaun* into meal, and rocked the children to sleep. Each of these activities involved a steady moving of the hands which the singing of songs composed in a regular meter could easily assist. This is especially true for the *chakki-nama* and the *charaka-nama*, the most widespread forms of Dakani folk poetry, both of which involved the turning of a wheel by hand. Such village poetry appealed to women not only because it accompanied the household chores that they in particular performed, but also because its content was permeated with imagery especially meaningful to them. Female love and its manifestations were typical themes in this literature, and metaphors frequently drew on the two worlds of a young bride: the parental home she had left and her new father-in-law's home.⁷

The few studies that have been made of Dakani folk literature trace it to the efforts by Sufis to expand their teachings among the unlettered folk of the Deccan plateau.⁸ This is no doubt true so far as the written tradition of this poetry is concerned. But it does not mean that Sufis originated the idea of singing songs while grinding *jaun* or while spinning thread. Some sort of folk poetry relating to work at the spinning wheel or the grindstone undoubtedly existed in the Marathi and Kannada oral traditions

³ Ziaul Sufi, "Dakani giti," *Majidat-i-omaniya*, *Dakani Adab Number*, no. 65 (1963-64), p. 217.

⁴ Abu'l-Hasan Ali Nadwi, *Sufi unjani*, ed. Sayyida Ja'far (Hyderabad, 1969), pp. 60-61 (passage quoted is from the editor's introduction to *Qadiri's book*).

⁵ See Rafiq Subhani, *Uddin mas'at ka upar aur irida* (Lahore, n.d.), p. 250.

⁶ Sufi, pp. 217-18; Subhani, pp. 217-18; Ja'far, pp. 60-61.

⁷ Ann E. S. Hamilton, "Free Thinking and Individual Freedom," in *Islam in the Modern World*, ed. Syed Ali Akbar (Dacca, 1964), p. 82.

⁸ R. A. Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism* (Cambridge, 1967), p. 65.

long before Islam penetrated the Deccan plateau and is probably as old as the ubiquitous grindstone or spinning wheel themselves.⁹ What Sufis did was to adapt the simplest elements of Sufi doctrine to the already existing vehicles of folk poetry and to substitute vernacular Dakhni for vernacular Marathi or Kannada.¹⁰ Since the Sufism injected into this literature carried with it the essentials of Islam, the Sufis' use of this vehicle may be said to represent a major development in the cultural history of the Deccan.

Sufi folk literature can be found today in both written and oral traditions. Despite the intrusion of modern media in the villages, folk poetry relating to household chores is still sung, though apparently less so today than formerly. In the written tradition, *chakki-namas* and *charkha-namas* have appeared in various cheap lithograph editions which can still be found in the Deccan countryside. There also exist manuscript versions of this poetry, of which some dozen, preserved in collections in Hyderabad, have come to my attention. These manuscripts indicate that most of the folk poetry discussed here originated with Bijapur Sufis of the Chishti order.

All eleven of these manuscripts, most of which are *chakki-namas*, are undated copies of poetry which, judging from the style of Dakhni used, can be ascribed to the seventeenth or early eighteenth century. One *chakki-nama* is attributed to Amin al-Din A'in (d. 1675),¹¹ an important seventeenth-century Sufi of notably heterodox tendencies. But this *chakki-nama* cannot be authentic, since it refers to events that occurred after Amin al-Din's death. Its style and content, however, clearly prove it to be the work of a Sufi, and probably a Sufi of Bijapur, since the scribe was himself a resident of that city.¹² Another *chakki-nama* closes with the name of Shah Hashim Khudawand Hadi (d. 1704-5),¹³ one of Amin al-Din's closest intimates (*khafiz*) at Bijapur, and both

⁹ The Marathi poems which village women of Maharashtra sing today while grinding meal are functionally identical with the *chakki-namas* of the Sufis. Significantly, they, too, serve a devotional purpose, the object of their devotion being the deity Vitthal at Pandharpur (see G. A. Bhatwade, *The Cult of Vitthal* (Poona, 1966), p. 6).

¹⁰ So far as I am aware, the Sufis of Bijapur used Dakhni in all their popular literature. It is possible, however, that an exhaustive search in Deccan villages might turn up folk poetry written by Sufis in the Kannada, Marathi, or Telugu languages. The poet of Kolhar, a town on the Krishna River directly south of Bijapur, informed me that he had some *chakki-namas* in the Dakhni language but transcribed into the Kannada script (Akbar Khan, interviewed at the Hashim dargah, Bijapur, July 10, 1970).

¹¹ Hyderabad, Sadar Jung Museum, Urdu MSS, Tussawuf & Akhlag no. 36.

¹² Ibid., fol. 7a.

¹³ Hyderabad, Idara-e-utbiyyat-o-urdu, no. 9315, fols. 126b-126c.

internal and external evidence would support its authenticity. A third *chakki-nama* was written by a certain Faruqi,¹⁴ a disciple (*murid*) of another of Amin al-Din A'in's followers and hence most likely affiliated with the heterodox tradition of Sufism that focused around Amin al-Din.¹⁵ Two other *chakki-namas* in manuscript form are of more recent origin. One of them, cataloged as that of a certain Ghansi,¹⁶ has recently been ascribed to a Sufi of Bijapur named FIT-Hal Qadiri (dates unknown).¹⁷ The other is of a certain Shah Kamal,¹⁸ or Shah Kamal al-Din (d. 1809-10), a Chishti Sufi from Belgaum who eventually settled in what is now Chitloor District and wrote the *chakki-nama* at his wife's request.¹⁹ There is also a manuscript copy of a *suhagan-nama*,²⁰ or married-woman's song, written by Shah Raja (d. 1681 or 1685), a Chishti of Bijapur who later migrated to Hyderabad.²¹ A manuscript copy of a *charkha-nama* is attributed to a certain Salar,²² but his place of origin is not known. Two other *chakki-namas* are attributed to the most famous Sufi of the Deccan plateau, Sayyid Muhammad Banda Navaz (d. 1422) of Gulbarga.²³ These, however are of doubtful authenticity, first because they are signed "Banda Navaz," an epithet that the Sufi himself never used,²⁴ and second, because he lived a century and a half before the first authentic *chakki-namas* appeared, putting any such work of his in gross chronological isolation.

Certain conclusions emerge from this discussion. In the first place, there is no doubt that all of the above manuscripts, even those whose authorship is most dubious, are the work of Sufis. Devotion to God and respect for one's *pir*, or spiritual guide, are their constant themes. Second, most of these manuscripts originated in Bijapur and are the work either of resident Sufis of the Chishti order or of lay members of the order who had studied

¹⁴ Hyderabad, Idara-e-utbiyyat-o-urdu, no. 657, fols. 1b-2b.

¹⁵ See Muhammad Zoro, *Tazkirat-e-mashhurat*, 5 vols. (Hyderabad, 1957), 3:282. 10 Hyderabad, Sadar Jung Museum, Urdu MSS, Tussawuf & Akhlag no. 37, fol. 1a-5a.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 62.

¹⁸ Hyderabad, Sadar Jung Museum, Urdu MSS, Pannal & Musayih no. 4.

¹⁹ Sadaswat Mitra, "Sayyid Shah Kamal al-Din," *Urdu* (April 1939), pp. 262-63; Zoro, 3:207.

²⁰ Hyderabad, Sadar Jung Museum, Urdu MSS, Farid & Musayih no. 144, fol. 1a-5a.

²¹ Abdul al-Jabbar Mulkapuri, comp., *Tazkira-yi auliya-i-dekan*, 2 vols. (Hyderabad, 1912-13), 1:337-41.

²² Hyderabad, Sadar Jung Museum, Urdu MSS, Tussawuf & Akhlag no. 35.

²³ Hyderabad, Idara-e-utbiyyat-o-urdu, MS no. 12015; Sadar Jung Museum, Urdu MSS, Tussawuf & Akhlag no. 37.

²⁴ Nasir al-Din Husami, "Khawaja banda navaz ki urdu shairi," *Hindistan* (October 1934), p. 447.

there and then migrated elsewhere in the Deccan. Third, this popular literature was not the work of the great mystical writers of Bijapur—Shah Mirzaji Shams al-'Ushshaq (d. 1499), Shah Burhan al-Din Juman (d. 1577), or Shaikh Mahmud Khashi Dahlan (d. 1617)—but of their immediate spiritual descendants who lived in the second half of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. But despite their separation in time by a generation or more, the mystical and popular writers were linked by close familial and doctrinal ties. In one of his works the mystic Burhan al-Din Juman alluded to the central symbol of the *chakki-nama*, the grindstone, in the same way that popular writers alluded to it: "In the case of the *chakki*, some other power is required—somebody's hand must be applied to move the wheel. There are many people who use the *chakki*, yet only the power hidden in the hand actually turns the wheel. That hand is 'arif al-amjad [knower of existence, i.e., God], and those who see that the power is in the hand are witnesses of the light; thereby they witness the essence, which is God."²⁵

If one analyzes the content of the *chakki-nama* or the *charkha-nama*, three interwoven themes can be found: (1) an ontological link established between God, the prophet Muhammad, one's own *pir*, and the reciter herself; (2) the use of the grindstone or the spinning wheel, or the mechanical parts thereof, to illustrate the above; and (3) the use of the mystics' *zitr*, or spiritual exercise, to accompany and even to regulate the various phases of the woman's work.

In the following *chakki-nama* of Shah Hashim Khudawand Hadi the first theme, the ontological link between God, the Prophet, the *pir*, and the woman at the grindstone, is clearly stated. In this passage are also explicated in simplified form the essential elements of the Ghisbi theory of Creation and of God's relationship to the material world, a theory which can be traced directly to the writings of the great Sijmush-Arabic mystic, Ibn al-'Arabi:

First was God's name,
And then His qualities.
In my mind I keep the name,
And with each breath
(refrain): Say "La-Ilah!" [There is no god]
Dwell on "Il-Allah!" [But Allah]
God Himself from the hidden treasure

²⁵ Burhan al-Din Juman, *Katimat al-haqiqat*, ed. M. Akbaruddin Siddiqi (Hyderabad, 1969), p. 63.

Has created the whole world artistically.
He has created it with His own power—
(refrain): Say "La-Ilah!"
Dwell on "Il-Allah."

God Himself came out from the hidden treasure
And showed Himself in the guise of the Prophet.
(refrain)

In the presence of God, the Prophet is the chief
Whose teachings have given us support in both worlds.
(refrain)

The Prophet's *khatafa* is 'Ali, who is dear to Him,
And whose disciples are our *pira*.
(refrain)

Allah, Muhammad, and 'Ali
Are our leaders whom we trust most
And obey as slaves.
(refrain)

Our *pir* has taken our hands in his;
He has given us connections whole-heartedly.
May he keep this connection forever.
(refrain): Say "La-Ilah!"
Dwell on "Il-Allah."²⁶

The theology here is as simple as the language. The devotee is not asked to master either the doctrinal knowledge of the theologian or the fine points of the Sufi's esoteric knowledge, but only to feel comfort in God's unity and majesty.

These simple Islamic precepts were reinforced by parallels and metaphors drawn between them and the various parts of the grindstone or spinning wheel at which the woman was working. "As the *chakki* turns, so we find God," concludes the above poem; "It shows its life in turning as we do in breathing."²⁷ Similar analogies are found in the *charkha-nama*:

Imagine that your body is a spinning wheel, oh sister.
We should get rid of our negligence
And give up worldly differences, oh sister.

The tongue is the unspun thread for the message of God;
The tongue is the rim of the spinning wheel.
Bring out the thread of breath and show it, oh sister.
Both of these mysteries should be in our throat:

God has given us the ability to turn our hand,
And it is that which moves the wheel, oh sister.
Faith must be for you what the drive-rope is for the wheel.
Perhaps you know of the two wheels connected by the rope;
Then you will know how the wheel turns, oh sister.²⁸

²⁶ Hashim Khudawand Hadi, *Chakki-nama 'Isfah*, Dakan manuscript (Hyderabad, 1969), fol. 128a.

²⁷ Ibid., fol. 128a.
²⁸ Salar, *Charkha-nama*, Dakan manuscript (Hyderabad, Salar Jung Museum, Tassarwar & Akhtar no. 36).

A third feature of this literature is its incorporation of the mystical *zikrs*, which are the spiritual exercises intended to bring a Sufi closer to God. For practicing mystics the *zikrs* had a specialized use, certain ones being associated with certain stages on the traveler's path toward God. In the popular literature, however, the *zikrs* were largely divorced of their mystical content and became more devotional. Although the various *zikrs* were still differentiated, they did not correspond to the stages of the path, as they did for the mystics, but to different functions being performed at the grindstone or the spinning wheel. Furthermore, all of the *zikrs* in this literature seem to be of a similar type—repetition of the names of God out loud—which in the mystic tradition would correspond only to the first and most elementary *zkr*, the *zkr-i-jali*. The following extract from a *charkha-nama* illustrates these points:

As you take the cotton, you should do *zkr-i-jali*.
As you separate the cotton, you should do *zkr-i-qadli*.
And as you spin the thread you should do *zkr-i-yami*.
Zkr should be uttered from the stomach through the chest,
And threaded through the throat.
The threads of breath should be counted one by one, oh sister.
Up to twenty-four thousand.
Do this day and night,
And offer this to your *pir* as a gift.²⁰

This passage best epitomizes the union of the high and low Sufi traditions, of Islam's religious philosophy and its popular religion. In it are found the main components of the Sufis' esoteric practice, merged with and adapted to a popular literary form which would be repeated in many households each time cotton thread would be spun. The result was quite comparable with the non-Muslim *bhakti* poetry of the contemporary Deccan—the Kannada *vachanas* of the Lingayats or the Marathi *abhangs* of the poet-saints of Pandharpur—in its use of a vernacular medium, its special appeal to women, and its devotional character.

The role that this Sufi folk literature has played in the spread of Islam in the Deccan, though impossible to measure with precision, seems to have been related to the phenomenon of *pir* worship and the devotionism at *pirs'* tombs which historically succeeded the worship of *pirs* themselves. One important reason that Sufis wrote the literature, apart from their general desire to expand their teachings among a constituency of commoners, was the object of securing for themselves the role of mediator

between God and the people who used the literature. Typical is the closing line of the above-quoted *charkha-nama*: "You are a maid-servant in your dervish's house. Say Allah and the Prophet's name on every breath."²¹ All available evidence indicates that in the seventeenth century a sizable nonelite constituency clustered around famous *pirs*, believing in their miraculous powers (*karamat*) and their ability to intercede with God, taking blessings from them, lighting candles at the *dargahs*, or tombs, of departed *pirs*, and participating in festivals at the *dargahs*. This was the outer circle of a *pir's* following, as distinguished from his inner circle of *murids*, or initiates, and it was to this outer circle that the folk literature seems especially to have appealed, serving as the litany of what may legitimately be called Indian folk Islam.

The dominant role played by women in this Indian folk Islam cannot be underestimated. One seventeenth-century account of a Sufi's conversations (*malfuzat*) noted that women were allowed to enter even the inner circle of a Sufi's followers.²² This would mean that at one time women, along with men, were instructed in the religious exercises of living Sufis. Later, as the Sufis became replaced by their tombs as objects of popular veneration, women came to comprise the great majority of devotees at any given *dargah* in the Deccan. Their motivation for participating in the *dargah's* various functions seems to have been primarily volitive in nature. That is, flowers, coins, or prayers would be offered up to the spirit of the *pir* buried at a particular *dargah* in the belief that the latter would redress some specific grievance or provide some specific fortune that had become associated with that *dargah*.²³ But whatever the special vows that became associated with individual *dargahs*, they were all generally associated with fertility. Indeed, the belief that visits to *dargahs* would in some measure enhance a woman's fertility is an obvious reason for their continuing popularity among rural women of the Deccan today.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ *Maqand al-murad*, comp. Shuh Murad, manuscript (Hyderabad, Asadgah Library, Tasmawaf no. 335), p. 129.

²² This volitive aspect of the *dargah* is, of course, very much in keeping with indigenous traditions with respect to shrines and pilgrimages. With reference to Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain pilgrimages, Agnew-Smith Bhargava has written that "vratas, 'vows' are often highly specific and they usually require a visit to one place only. It is the place where a deity specializes, as it were, in reparting blessings, or balancing some need of the pilgrim who seeks remedy. The formulation of the *vratas* (vows), must generally pith, is something like this: 'If I gain x or overcome y or accomplish z, I shall make a pilgrimage to A'; or, 'Because I have not gained x, etc., I shall make a pilgrimage to A in order to gain it, for A is known to specialize in granting x'" ("Pilgrimage Sites and Indian Civilization," in *Chapters in Indian Civilization*, ed. Joseph W. Elder, 2 vols. [Dubuque, Ia., 1970], 1:94).

Women originally attracted to the Sufis of the seventeenth century were probably of the same social origins as those presently participating in the social life of the *dargahs*. One could speculate that nonelite women living on the fringes of Hindu society would have gravitated toward Sufis and their tombs as places of religious refuge from any number of worldly concerns. These women would certainly have included widows of most castes, for organized Hindu society has little room for such individuals. Then, too, one could expect that barren women of various castes would have been attracted to the *dargahs* because of the latter's association with fertility. What all such women probably shared in common was an eclectic religious attitude on account of which they would have perceived no great theological or social wall existing between Islam and Hinduism. For them the village *dargah* formed only one more facet of an already diffuse and syncretic religious life.³²

The pervasive influence of women in the life of the *dargahs* provides an important clue in tracing the role of Sufi folk literature in the expansion of Islam in the Deccan. Judging from the content of the folk literature described above, it seems likely that the women who had come into contact with the folk traditions of the *dargahs* transmitted this tradition to the children living in their households by constantly repeating the poetry. Children would be rocked to sleep at night or day by lullabies (*luri-nama*) that had originated in the *dargahs*; they would hear *chakki-namas* or *charkhi-namas* recited daily in their own households each time grain was ground or thread was spun. Hence, just as one's first language is frequently termed one's "mother tongue," so also the mother—or indeed any household woman in the proximity of children—has doubtless been instrumental in the transmission of religious practices and attitudes at rural levels. Through this rather insidious medium, though perhaps not intended as such by its authors, Sufi folk literature invaded rural households and gradually gained an established place amidst the eclectic religious life of the rural Deccan.

The above argument is that both the vehicle of folk literature originally penned by Sufis of the Deccan and the institution of the *dargah* have assimilated into the world of folk Islam various nonelite and predominantly female elements of the Deccan rural

³² "Indian Islam," observed J. Spencer Trimingham, "seems to have been a holy-man Islam. These (Sufi) migrants in the Hindu environment acquired an aura of holiness, and it was this which attracted Indians to them, rather than formal Islam" (*The Sufi Orders in Islam* [Oxford, 1971], p. 22).

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population from the seventeenth century to the present. However, this process should not be construed as "conversion" to Islam, nor should the Sufis themselves be considered as Muslim "missionaries," though both terms have frequently been used in the general context of Sufis and the expansion of Islam. The main problem is that both terms carry connotations of a nineteenth- and twentieth-century Christian movement in India, a context in which "missionary" denoted a self-conscious propagator of the Christian faith and "conversion" a self-conscious turning around in religious conviction. But the evidence concerning Bijapur's Sufis would not permit calling any of them missionaries in this sense. They made no conscious effort to gain non-Muslim followers, though it is true that many lower-caste non-Muslims were attracted to the Sufis' supposed supernatural power and entered, by gradual degrees, their outer and inner circles. The folk literature examined in this essay aimed primarily at committing its readers to a *pir*; the diffusion of Islamic precepts seems in the final analysis to have been a by-product of this effort.

Similarly, "conversion" in the sense of a self-conscious, sudden, and total change of belief is an inadequate term to describe the process by which non-Muslims of the Deccan became attracted to certain Sufis, or later, to the *dargahs*. There are today several Muslim groups in Bijapur District whose ancestors are claimed to have been converted to Islam by one or another medieval Sufi. But ethnographic evidence indicates that these same groups, far from having suddenly "converted" to Islam at any single point in time, have been and still are undergoing a gradual process of Islamic acculturation—reflected in dress, food, speech, etc.—which is not only gradual but uneven from one group to another.³⁴ While it is true that some Sufis seem to have initiated such a process by attracting non-Muslims to their fold, what they left behind them, namely, their folk literature and their tombs, have deepened and continued an on-going process of Islamic acculturation among nonelite groups in Deccan society.

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³⁴ An ethnographic survey of Bijapur District conducted for the 1984 *Bombay Gazetteer* illustrates this point. The survey showed twenty-one Muslim "castes," of Hindu origin, all in various stages of Islamic acculturation as measured by variables such as purity of Urdu speech, practice of circumcisions, tilak, attachment to Hindu deities and festivals, etc. (see *Gazetteer of Bombay Presidency: Bijapur District* 23 [Bombay, 1984]: 292–305).